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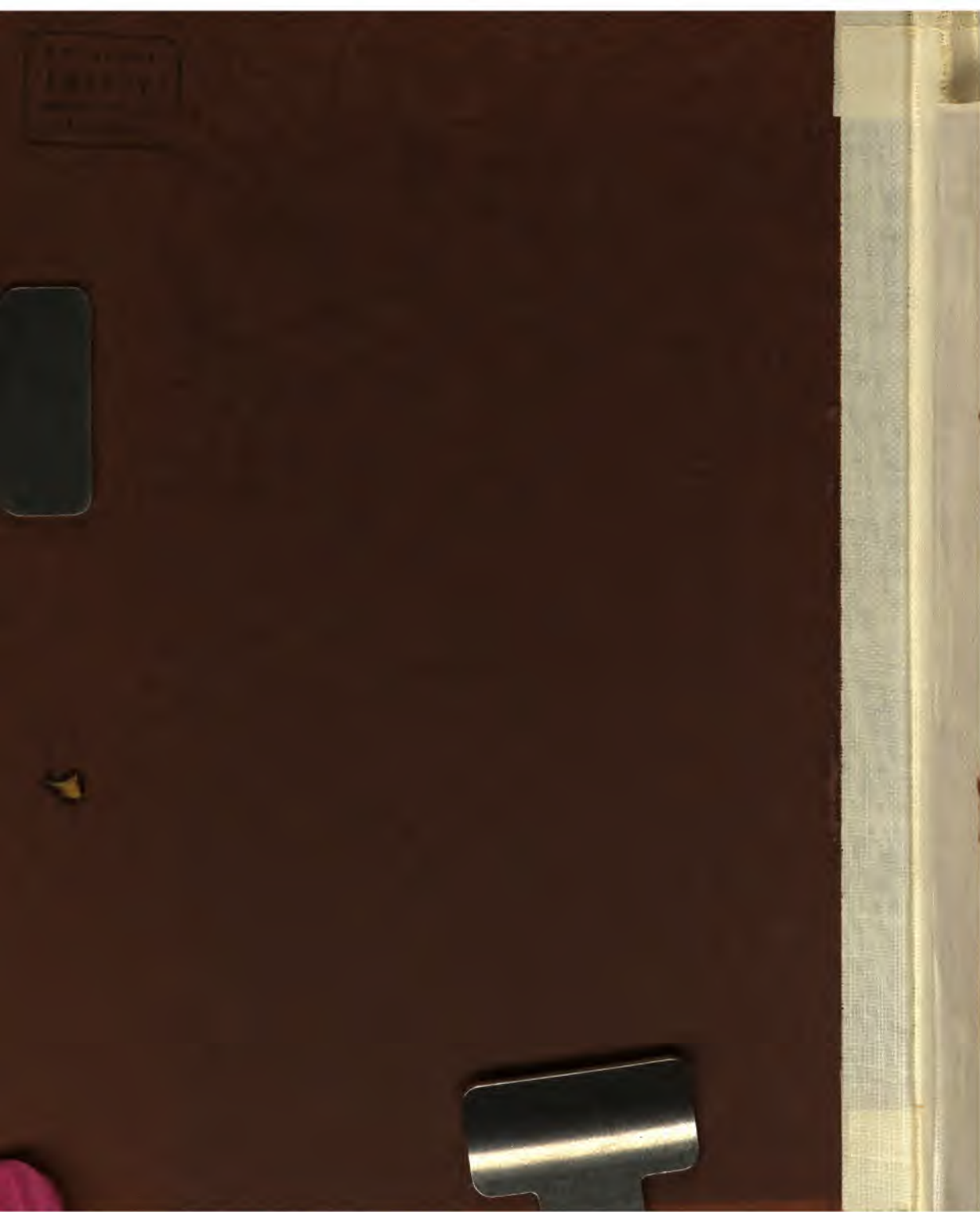
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ON THE NATURE  
OF LYRIC

GERALD GOULD

QUAIN ESSAY

LONDON: A. C. FIFEELD

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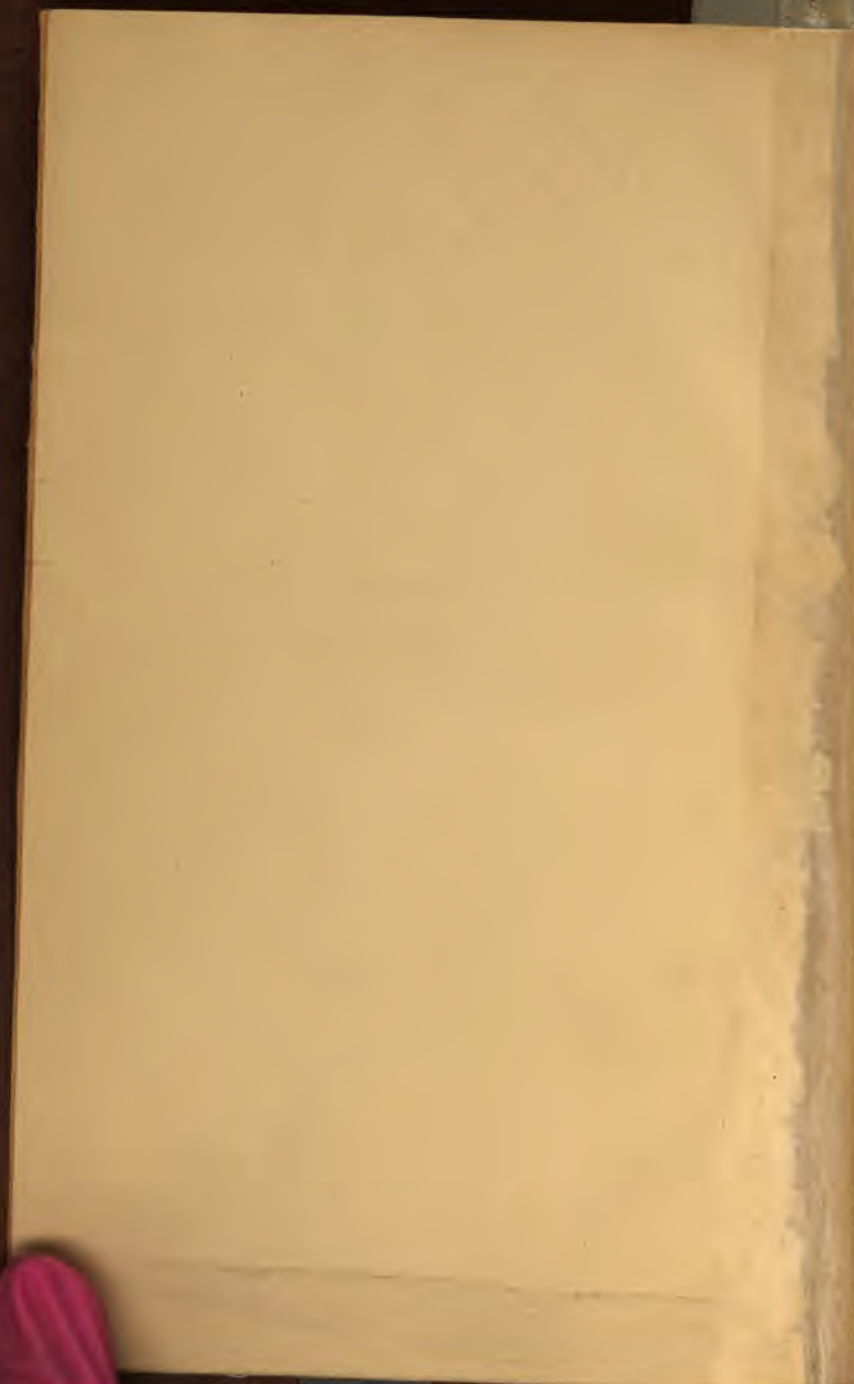




AN ESSAY  
ON THE NATURE OF LYRIC

Quain Prize Essay  
University College, London  
1908

W. H. & A. S. B. Co.  
ALBANY, N. Y.  
1880



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# An Essay On the Nature of Lyric

Illustrated from the History of English Poetry

By  
Gerald Gould, B.A.

Fellow of University College, London  
Exhibitioner of Magdalen College, Oxford

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*The historical matter in this essay is largely drawn from two works indispensable in any study of the history of Lyric—“Early English Lyrics,” edited by Messrs. E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick, with Mr. Chambers’s essay on “Some Aspects of Mediæval Lyric”; and Mr. Sidney Lee’s edition of Elizabethan Sonnets, with his introductory essay. Quotations from these and other critical and historical works are referred to their authors in the text as they occur.*

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On the Nature of Lyric

IT may very reasonably be contended that the lyric, as opposed to the epic and dramatic, is the form in which the poetry of to-day tends chiefly to be written, and to which we may expect the poetry of the succeeding age more and more to confine itself; and this, if true, is in itself sufficient to give a special interest to the question of the nature of lyric. Indeed, the two questions react upon each other; for if there is such a tendency at work as is here suggested, its connection with the inherent qualities of the lyric as such must be an essential one; there must be a correspondence between the mood of literature to-day and the mood or moods specially adapted to lyrical expression. We must look to the problem, in what sense lyric can be said to be the prevailing form at present, for some light on the larger problem of what we mean by the word. The larger problem is indeed not only the beginning but also the end of this inquiry. Firstly, then, it is clear that the contention here suggested as a reasonable one would be immediately reduced to absurdity by insistence upon any narrow or technical sense of the term lyric. We could not, for instance, profitably accept Wordsworth's analysis of the technical differences in poetic form, though it is of great interest in any critical examination

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of poetry. He distinguishes five "moulds" or "forms"—the Narrative, the Dramatic, the Lyrical, the Idyllium, and the Didactic; and of the third of these he writes that it contains "the hymn, the ode, the elegy, the song, and the ballad; in all which, for the production of their full effect, an accompaniment of music is indispensable." Now it is obvious that, for our purpose, we must widen these bounds of the term, and alter its meaning also not a little. There is to seek in modern literature that close connection with music which Wordsworth claimed as essential to this particular poetic "mould." It is worth while to notice how far he himself was from insisting upon a complete acceptance of his own law. "All poets," he writes, "have been in the practice of feigning that their works were composed to the music of the harp or the lyre: with what degree of affectation this has been done in modern times, I leave to the judicious to determine. For my own part, I have not been disposed to violate probability so far, or to make such a large demand upon the reader's charity. Some of these pieces [the extract is from the preface to the edition of 1815] are essentially lyrical; and therefore cannot have their due force without a supposed musical accompaniment; but, in much the greatest part, as a substitute for the classic lyre or romantic harp, I require nothing more than an animated or impassioned recitation, adapted to the subject. Poems, however humble in their kind, if they be good in that kind, cannot read themselves: the law of long syllable and short must not be so inflexible,—the letter of metre must not be so impassive to the spirit of versification,—as to deprive the reader of a voluntary power to modulate, in subordination to the sense, the music of the poem;—in the



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same manner as his mind is left at liberty, and even summoned, to act upon its thoughts and images. But though the accompaniment of a musical instrument be frequently dispensed with, the true poet does not therefore abandon his privilege distinct from that of the mere proseman—

'He murmurs near the running brooks  
A music sweeter than their own.' "

With this quotation we may take leave of any serious idea that the modern lyrist writes definitely to a tune, or that music necessarily suggests itself to him as part of the artistic whole he designs to produce. "What strikes us in the whole of this great mass of lyric poetry," writes J. A. Symonds of the Elizabethan song-books—"is its perfect adaptation to music, its limpidity and directness of utterance."—"We discover," he says further, "but little of this quality in the lyrics of the Victorian age"; and he records that when he had read two poems of Shelley, the "Song of Pan" and "Swiftly walk o'er the western wave," to an eminent singer, she "pointed out how the verbal melody seemed intended to be self-sufficing in these lyrics, how full of complicated thoughts and changeful images the verse is, how packed with consonants the words are. . . ." Here, as always in art, the external change is but the other side of the internal; the crowding of consonants is not an unlucky accident, but the expression of a mood. What Wordsworth says of the modulation supplied by the reader really supplies an explanation of the divorce between music and poetry. The poem is presented to the reader as a definite and complete appeal; he is not asked to sing it to a tune, nor should he even be asked to "re-

cite" it in an "animated and impassioned manner." He is expected to do with it just what he must do with any work of art presented on its merits—with a piece of music or a picture no less than with a poem. The mood and suggestion must come home to him as belonging to himself; he must be in touch with the effect the poet intended to convey.) And it is because the establishing of this relation is the final achievement of the poem, because one can pick up a book, read, and be haunted thenceforward by the way the verses sound and move to oneself, that the poet may well come to be content with this process and this achievement. As a matter of fact, the etymological sense is never what the modern man has in mind when he uses the word "lyric." Nor does he use it in such severe distinction from other terms as Wordsworth would have one do. Victorian poetry abounds, for instance, in the idyll, to which so often a lyrical form, quality, or atmosphere has been given that it would be difficult entirely to dissociate it from the pure lyric in our thoughts. The incursion of the dramatic element amounts to almost the same thing; the dramatic lyric of Browning has much in common with the idyll of Tennyson. Thus for the moment it may perhaps be safer to mark off what is meant by lyric by laying down what it is not, and to re-state our contention in the words that the age of epic is over and poetic drama a less vital form than it was. To quote again from J. A. Symonds: "The Victorian age can boast no national drama. Poetical plays have indeed been produced which do credit to the talents of their authors. Yet the century has not expressed its real stuff, nor shown its actual clairvoyance in that line. We cannot point to a Victorian drama as we do to an



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Elizabethan drama, and challenge the world to match it. This is due perhaps in part to those incalculable changes which have substituted the novel for the drama. The public of the present time is a public of readers rather than of hearers, and the muster-roll of brilliant novelists, from Scott and Jane Austen, through Thackeray and Dickens, down to George Eliot and George Meredith, can be written off against the playwrights of the sixteenth century. Poetry, surveyed from a sufficient altitude, claims these imaginative makers, though they used the vehicle of prose." Surely it would be better to give the same simple reason for the neglect of the long narrative poem, rather than to venture as Symonds does on the assertion that "it is not given to any race under the conditions of conscious culture to produce a genuine epic." Indeed the nineteenth century did of course have its triumphs in narrative poetry too; but the question is whether these constitute a popular and prevailing type. If neither they nor the achievements of drama do so, then lyric, according to our negative requirement, does. But we cannot for long rest content with a merely negative test; we need a positive one; and this we may perhaps find in a certain quality of spontaneity, if we remember at the same time that spontaneity is a term not to be applied in this connection without a careful examination of its meaning. For the modern tendency is in the direction of subtlety, of elaboration, of introspection, of psychological analysis. It is difficult to be simple in a highly self-conscious age; words have accumulated so embarrassing a connotation, and rules have been so carefully discussed. Of course subjection to law is in artistic composition quite frequently unconscious, and

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does not preclude immediacy of inspiration ; but we comprise too much, as a matter of actual practice under the head of lyric, to be able to claim for it as a whole what is loosely understood by spontaneity. Few people would quarrel with Palgrave's inclusion of Lycidas in his " Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics " yet Lycidas is built up with the exactest skill of craftsmanship. We are at any rate free to believe, however that the phrases came by inspiration ; for though the manuscript shows that they were much polished and altered, that does not interfere with the theory that the poet records what, as it were, he overhears. He may hear wrongly, insufficiently, the first time ; he may listen for months, and insert many stop-gaps of his own before the right word comes.

" The statue, Buonarotti said, doth wait  
Thralled in the block, for me to emancipate :  
The poem, saith the poet, wanders free  
Till I betray it to captivity."

Lyric is not, then, in its present-day sense, composed necessarily, or primarily, for musical accompaniment, nor is it the spontaneous outburst of the untutored mind, in contradistinction to the severe laws by which tragedy and epic must be constrained. It might indeed be just barely possible to establish a relation between the more undeniably lyrical of modern poems and that kind of poetry which was originally composed to be sung to the strains of the lyre. Yet to do so would be unsatisfactory, for it would ignore difference of conditions. One of Milton's three requirements for a poem was that it should be simple ; and in his sense of simplicity the requirements hold for any work of



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art. It is indeed but a reassertion of the inviolable principle of unity, which survives the misapprehensions of the classicists and the defiance of the romantics quite unshaken in its validity. A work of art must be a complete, consistent, and satisfying whole; it must get its own effect. To the ancient Greek the unit of a particular kind of artistic effect comprised the music of the lyre, just as an opera comprises all the arts, without being any the less simple and single for that. The obvious difference is that the modern ear, the modern mind, dissociates and takes its pleasures, at any rate in the lyrical sphere, separately. It expects from lyric a particular sensation; and this sensation is one of spontaneity, as we may easily decide by using Matthew Arnold's famous method of the test passage. Every one surely has in his mind some such passage, which he does in fact instinctively put to this use; and probably no more generally acceptable test could be found than Shelley's lines:—

“ I arise from dreams of thee  
In the first sweet sleep of night,  
When the winds are breathing low  
And the stars are shining bright :  
I arise from dreams of thee,  
And a spirit in my feet  
Has led me—who knows how ?  
To thy chamber-window, sweet ! ”

Here breathes the very soul of lyric, seeming scarcely to contaminate itself with mortal speech. But to determine in what sense we may take spontaneity for the main characteristic of poems such as this, we must distinguish their effect upon the reader from their mode

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of composition. The former must be spontaneous, and sudden; and here perhaps is the test, not only of lyric, the special form, but of artistic expression in general. The mind, in Wordsworth's words, "is left at liberty, and even summoned, to act upon" the thoughts and images of the poem. Poetry is a matter of implication; mind must answer to mind; what is in one must be contributed to assist in the self-expression of the other. In art, not only creation but also appreciation is, like laughter, "sudden glory." There has to be at some point a discovery suddenly correlating the accumulations of experience, so that one says: "Why was this never thought of before?" The discovery is made by the poet and recognised by his audience; and it is from the point of view of the latter that spontaneity is an essential of the lyric; the poet himself, whether he works quickly or slowly, in either case works within strict rules, which must be consciously or unconsciously mastered beforehand; even when an inspiration comes, like that of Kubla Khan, mystically in sleep, it passes into a mind possessed of much literary tradition and conversant with the treatment of literary forms. It is difficult to find beginnings; for a clear distinction must be drawn between the rude compositions of a primitive and untutored race, observing no rules because there are no rules to observe, and the individual swiftness or suddenness or spontaneity of composition in the case of a particular poem. The good poet, however headlong his methods may appear, does not break but utilises laws. It is impossible to get outside or behind tradition; the poet is made up of the very substance of all preceding ages; he thinks their thoughts, dreams their dreams; his simplicity depends for its



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success on their correlative complexity. No one in an era so sophisticated as the Elizabethan "warbled his native wood-notes wild," except so far as there is in some of the casual lyrics, notably of Shakespeare, a curious quality which does in a way seem to justify the application of the phrase. The same quality is to be found in Blake. It is with these two poets at any rate as though the very possibilities offered them by metre and rule were occasionally rejected in the ardour of a wilful simplicity; what they have to express is so immediate that even the monosyllables of a child's vocabulary seem to hamper and overweigh it; they break out into sheer unintelligibility, and are off on the mere tune. So sang perhaps the earliest singers of the folk, but not from choice; Shakespeare knew what effect he desired, and if his songs do not fail of their effect, it is because they are in harmony with something more important than what they cast away. True as it may be that Shakespeare wrote so in a careless mood, yet there is no reason why metre and rule should not go when the inner meaning of the poem is something which requires them not; and to be dispensed with so easily is in art to have been from the first external and unessential. To dispense with externals is by no means, as we shall see in the case of Walt Whitman, to break with tradition or be false to form. Of course to dispense with the essentials, to produce bad art, is a different matter; this too Shakespeare did on occasion, though perhaps rarely in the pure lyric; and as for Blake, in so far as he fails to obey certain laws, he fails altogether. He kept the laws that he made for himself; he was wholly justified in his own eyes; but in our eyes he can be justified only in those instances where he comes



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under a law that is universal; when his result is only such as he would accept himself, but such as we sub-consciously expect. There is a sensation of extraordinary acuteness, hard to explain in words, which comes home to any one who watches children at play on summer evenings, as the dusk begins to gather. It is an elusive and profound emotion, and from Blake or from any one we might reasonably expect an adequate interpretation of it. What we get is this:—

“When the voices of children are heard on the green,  
And whisperings are in the dale,  
The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,  
My face turns green and pale.”

Then suddenly the mood changes; something is recaptured which was out of touch with the poet in the first verse, or at any rate—how lamentably!—in the last line of it; and we get:—

“Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down  
And the dews of night arise;  
Your spring and your day are wasted in play  
And your winter and night in disguise.”

Here the spontaneity is subdued to law, and the wild wood-notes are warbled to a better tune. But the point is that there is no opposition between the law and the spontaneity; each without the other has all the harshness of the incomplete; neither of the two exists in its fulness until the two are one. This union is creation, and is recognised as such. The true lyric comes upon you like the first star in a summer sky; it is a new light in the mind; it was not, and it is. Or if in a sense it was already, yet the discovery is new. Can it, however, be claimed for lyric that it possesses this

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quality in a unique degree? Is there any sense of the words in which it is reasonable to say that lyric is the essential type of poetry? The weakness of the test-method for distinguishing the lyric note is just that it cannot settle disputes; it leaves the criterion with the individual. The difficulty of definition is of course the old one; we collect from all the instances submitted a general idea of what we mean by the term, and then proceed, dubiously, to re-apply. Yet we need not be denied the comfort of belief in an actually essential quality; there is, could we but capture it in an explanation, the lyrical spirit, the authentic tone. The question then becomes complicated with that of the spirit of poetry at large; how to distinguish that, and, within that, the lyric. What of the great phrases of epic and dramatic literature? Scattered up and down their pages we find passage after passage with the quality of spontaneity, of sudden and inexplicable illumination; passage after passage of peculiar value, perhaps, in its setting, yet complete in itself. Is there any difference in kind between the mournful and musical speech of Richard II in the play, and any of Browning's dramatic lyrics? If there is, it cannot lie in the imagination of circumstances; that framework has in either case to be presupposed. It cannot lie in the self-abandonment of the expression—the outpouring of a personal and intimate emotion, for that also the two have in common. Nor can the mere measure constitute a real difference; it may be seen from Browning's own works that blank verse is on occasion lyrical. When he breaks out—

“O lyric love, half angel and half bird,  
And all a wonder and a wild desire!”



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there is, in swiftness of motion, in fervour of passion, in fineness and delicacy of rhythm, no distinction to be drawn between blank verse such as this and the lyric pure and simple and acknowledged. Or again, in "Any Wife to any Husband" we have a lyric labelled and confessed; yet it moves slowly, it uses the heroic line, it analyses and considers.

"Only, why should it be with stain at all?  
Why must I, 'twixt the leaves of coronal,  
Put any kiss of pardon on thy brow?  
Why need the other women know so much,  
And talk together, 'Such the look and such  
The smile he used to love with, then as now'?"

Surely this remains lyrical for all that can be urged on the other side. And just as we can detach extracts with the same quality from the drama or narrative of Shakespeare and Browning, so we can understand how Myers came to write that Anticleia "begins—

οὐτ' ἔμεγ' ἐν μεγαροῖσιν εὐσκοπος ἰοχέαιρα——"

That is not where Anticleia began; but it is the beginning of a lyric as beautiful as it is brief. True, it owes much of its beauty to its position, to the circumstance that surround its utterance; but it is to position in one sense or another that we must turn for any explanation of poetical quality and effect, nor can we afford to overlook its importance, whatever stress we may lay on the value of the mere phrase. From one point of view the phrase is the real unit, and the poem, at any rate the lyric, does but consist of a phrase extended or elaborated. The very profundity of interpretation can be sounded

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a line; the things we chiefly remember from our reading are those

“jewels five-words long  
That on the stretch'd forefinger of all time  
Sparkle for ever.”

granted this—granted that the essential of a poem is, not the phrase, at any rate the grouping of a few phrases round a single idea, and that what we require of the poet is that he should be

“Stung with the splendour of a sudden thought,”

When in arguing that the lyrical is the typical form we shall be involved in a *petitio principii* which for all its logical error may indicate the way to truth. To decide that a lyric is anything exhibiting the qualities of good poetry, and to prove it by picking out all the finest passages we can discover and calling them lyrical, is no doubt an unsatisfactory process; but the bare fact of its possibility within the meaning of the terms as commonly and loosely employed points to a certain probability in the claim that the essence of lyric is one with the essence of poetry. We require of any art a whole that is at once spontaneous and artistic; and the very brevity of lyric aids it here. Lycidas is perhaps the longest poem in the language of which every line is poetical, and in which no part is thought of as dissociated from the whole. It is not literally inconceivable that an epic or a drama should be written which should preserve such a level of exaltation and such a unity of effect; but has it ever been done, or is it likely to be? In fine, the lyric is the only kind whose length and nature admit of the essentially poetical effect of suddenness, being maintained throughout, and all the



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elements of its effect being comprised in an immediate view. To say this is to make a definite assertion as to its nature, but is not to cut it off from that conception of poetry as ultimately a matter of position which is most obviously illustrated in the dramatic kind. The position of the phrase is as essential as the words themselves; the two elements become one in the poetic flash; their union indeed is fundamentally the same as that of matter and form. It is by position that simple language gains expressiveness: Shylock's

"I pray you, give me leave to go from hence—  
I am not well"

lays bare in its last four words the incomparable bitterness of a base design made pitiful by failure; Medea's *ἐτίκτον αὐτούς* spoken with tears of the children she is intent to murder, has the same startling and arresting force. And the point of importance is that this is not a function of drama alone; the mind always provides a context out of the experience of itself and the race. It would scarcely be too much to say that the context implied is what gives the poetic value. The line—

"Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead"

needs no exposition of attendant fact; it is dramatic, it suggests; yet it is concentrated into the emotion of a moment, and exhorts the reader

"... pause here upon this strip of time  
Allotted you out of eternity."

Emphatically, the poetic value is of the same kind in drama and in lyric; only what is more explicit in the former is implicit in the latter. And the modernisation of literature lies exactly in the increased possibility of im-



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lication; the lyric takes advantage of its possibilities and thrives. For every word gains in meaning every time it is used. It has more of the emotion of humanity to illuminate, to use and translate and transfuse. To say this is to raise the question of intrinsic as opposed to historical value, but to show that the opposition is unreal is a task that may be hopefully undertaken. "We tend," says Mr. H. G. Wells, "to accumulate intension in terms."—"There is a whole literary past," says Mr. E. K. Chambers, "behind one who endeavours to sum up a thousand poetical introductions in the single line—

'Lenten ys come with love to tounne.'

As the man grows, as the race grows, the sounds that stand for things become fuller and fuller of suggestion; mere syllables call up the past, and bring back the sense of a country known and dear, just as the turning of a road will sometimes confront us with a sight we feel to be not new but already intimate. Only, more than this, the land of poetry is not a mere counterpart of the land we know; it is an ideal type, which gives meaning and worth and validity to the familiar places, and does not draw its meaning from its similarity to them. When we speak of remembering such a land as this, we are using only a clumsy symbol, working, as prose examination must work, within those limits of time which poetry throws off so easily and so completely; and yet probably the symbol of memory is the best we can use, for indeed the experience is very similar. The poet comes back like the philosopher of Plato to judge the shadows on the wall by the truth he has known in the sunlight above. And some such

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theory as this is strictly necessary to account for the fact that, for all the influence of position, the force of poetry does not in the last resort depend upon the intension accumulated in terms. If it did—and that it does not goes far to settle the difficulty of actual and historical value—nothing would be easier than to write poetry. All men feel a strangeness, an expectancy, in the twilight; every day they live, every poem they read, adds of necessity to that feeling, so that by now the mere word is rich with the treasures of experience, full of subtle indistinguishable sounds, of fading colours, of shy and tremulous airs. But all the same one cannot write a poem by talking about the twilight. The names themselves, however liberally crowded into the verse, will not do. We require something different, something which only the poet can do for us. A man may throng his verses with stars and flood them with seas, yet leave us cold. Stevenson chose two lines as typical of what poetry can do at its highest—

“ And visited all night by troops of stars ”  
and— “ The multitudinous seas incarnadine.”

Few will dispute his judgment. And yet—how is it that in these lines, out of all the lines that employ much the same language in but slightly different combinations, we are led to ideal waters and archetypal mountains, confronted with authentic night? Whence comes—

“ The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration and the poet's dream ” ?

Myers has attempted an answer to these questions, and given one which is perhaps as good as an answer to the unanswerable can be. “ The range of human thoughts



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and emotions," he writes, "greatly transcends the range of such symbols as man has invented to express them; and it becomes, therefore, the business of Art to use these symbols in a double way. They must be used for the direct representation of thought and feeling; but they must also be combined by so subtle an imagination as to suggest much which there is no means of directly expressing. And this can be done: for experience shows that it is possible so to arrange forms, colours, and sounds as to stimulate the imagination in a new and inexplicable way. This power makes the painter's art an imaginative as well as an imitative one; and gives birth to the art of the musician, whose symbols are hardly imitative at all, but express emotions which, till music suggests them, have been not only unknown but unimaginable. Poetry is both an imitative and an imaginative art. As a choice and condensed form of emotional speech, it possesses the reality which depends on its directly recalling our previous thoughts and feelings. But as a system of rhythmical and melodious effects—not indebted for their potency to their associated ideas alone—it appeals also to that mysterious power by which mere arrangements of sound can convey an emotion which no one could have predicted beforehand, and which no known laws can explain. . . . And indeed, in poetry of the first order, almost every word (to use a mathematical metaphor) is raised to a higher power. It continues to be an articulate sound and a logical step in the argument; but it becomes also a musical sound and a centre of emotional force. It becomes a musical sound—that is to say, its consonants and vowels are arranged to bear a relation to the consonants and vowels near it—a

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relation of which accent, quantity, rhyme, assonance and alliteration are specialised forms, but which may be of a character more subtle than any of these. And it becomes a centre of emotional force, that is to say, the complex associations which it evokes modify the associations evoked by other words in the same passage in a way quite distinct from grammatical or logical connection. (The poet, therefore, must avoid two opposite dangers. If he thinks too exclusively of the music and colouring of his verses—of the imaginative means of suggesting thought and feeling—what he writes will lack reality and sense. But if he cares only to communicate definite thought and feeling according to the ordinary laws of eloquent speech, his verse is likely to be deficient in magical and suggestive power.) We have then two facts—firstly, that poetry depends on the experience and imagination, hereditary and traditional, of the individual and the race—upon all that we have come to connect with certain of the words we use; and secondly, that poetry is not wrought by the mere using of such words, but by the unique aptness and harmony of their conjunction with certain elusive and profound sentiments, which the reader must in a sense already have before he can recognise them in the poem. So it is, Plato tells us, with all knowledge. Poetry is the identity of the poet's purpose with the form he chooses as its instrument, yet not of these only, but of the soul of the individual with the soul of the world. Nor is it easy on any less mystical assumption than the one here implied to explain why poetry should be dear and delightful in the way in which it is. But it would seem that the poet differs from those who are not poets, not so much by any power of grasping ulti-





Of course, however, poetry does more than record experience. We may doubt whether it is always a result of remembering; surely some lyrical outbursts—notably Shelley's—seem to be the immediate expression of the emotion itself. But who shall say what accumulation of experience went to make that emotion possible? Individuals, like races, make their art out of their past, and this is true of the artist and his audience alike.

“The half of music, I have heard men say,  
Is to have grieved.”

Again, poetry, whether immediate or meditated, must in either case possess the “saving grace” of thought. Emotion as such is inarticulate; while thought, on the other hand, need not be less spontaneous than feeling—the mind may work as vehemently and suddenly as the heart. If poetry must be “simple, sensuous, and passionate,” yet it must be much more. We go beyond what is ordinarily understood to be the function of either heart or mind when we speak of poetry as the expression of emotion; for by expression in this case we mean interpretation; and were poetry to interpret experience merely in the terms of experience, it would lack that great adequacy and finality of interpretation which is its proper characteristic. We cannot in reading or in criticising poetry keep clear of mysticism; no academic solution is necessary or possible. Wordsworth, it will be remembered, drew a cogent parallel between the aims and methods of poetry on the one hand and religion on the other. But, as in religion, so in poetry, there is a meeting-place where the planes of reason and faith cut across each other, a starting-place for merely reasonable and uninspired consideration. The supreme

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test of art remains the subjective one ; a man knows a good poem by the fact that it moves him, an unworthily artificial one by the fact that it does not ; but perhaps he should not stop there. We read, "The rest is silence," and shut the book, having arrived at something ultimate in conception and expression. But then in a little while we are driven to ask ourselves why the few syllables mean so much. There is indeed a doubt whether the critics can do more than carry the difficulty a step further back, expounding and elucidating with the weapons of the logical process, until at last they bring us to where intuition must step in to explain the explanation. Philosophy appears to deal in much the same way with its votaries ; it can do no more than prepare the ground for faith. So true is it in both spheres that we can learn only what we know already. There is such a thing as illuminating criticism, criticism that does indeed throw light and give help ; but the help and the light are such as can be accepted only by that same faculty by which in the first instance the poetry was known to us for what it was. To illustrate this it is necessary but to turn to a single sentence from that essay of Myers from which quotation has already been made. "What is meant," he writes, "by the vague praise so often bestowed on Virgil's unequalled style is practically this, that he has been, perhaps, more successful than any other poet in fusing together the expressed and the suggested emotion ; that he has discovered the hidden music which can give to every shade of feeling its distinction, its permanence, and its charm ; that his thoughts seem to come to us on the wings of melodies prepared for them from the foundations of the world." It is on the conception of criticism



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justified by such a passage as this that poetry is indeed a "criticism of life." Now the meeting-place of the two planes, the place whence criticism must start, lies of necessity where the question of form enters in. It is just with this union of the poet's purpose and the form chosen that the critic has to deal. Wordsworth has shown clearly what is meant by speaking of the poet's purpose. "Each of them," he says of his own poems, "has a worthy *purpose*. Not that I mean to say, I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived, but my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*." It is essential to understand the other, the formal side, with equal clearness; for in a sense all critical distinctions are formal. Impulse and purpose cannot be examined, they must be assumed; and their union with expression is of the nature of a miracle, not to be explained. However true it may be that spontaneity is the characteristic quality of lyric, and that the form cannot be separated from the natural mode of expression which that quality implies and carries with it, yet it is as form that criticism must accept the work of art submitted to it. The point of view which disparages the formal side is thus put by Professor Raleigh: "The birth speech of faith is the lyric. The purest lyrical utterances do not depend for their beauty on the arrangement of accents and the counting of syllables; translate them into any language, and they still run straight into song. There is no version of the Magnificat which does not rise lifted on a climbing sea of melody; it is the voice of the faith of all the women in the world. 'For He hath



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regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden'—what treatise on metre can explain that rapture of song? The spontaneity of whole-hearted joy will save it from all essential faults of expression; its only business is to flow, and it has no choice but to take the easiest outlet." Now it is just this view of lyric utterance, this meaning of the word spontaneity, that has seemed to us inapplicable to the facts. It is very true that no treatise on metre can explain the rapture of any song; but surely that is no proof of what Professor Raleigh would have it prove. With his theory of translation it is worth while to contrast Shelley's: "Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order of the relations of thought. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a sort of uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves, without reference to that peculiar order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour as seek to transpose from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower—and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel." If it be answered that some seeds are common to all races, and that from the emotion of the Magnificat will arise in any language the flower of song, this is no more than to say that there are certain universal subjects of artistic treatment, it is not to justify translation. It would be easy to draw

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from Professor Raleigh's words the conclusion that to have an emotion is to be able to express it; yet this cannot have been meant. Moreover, in the extract quoted above, it is "the spontaneity of whole-hearted joy" which will save song from "all essential faults of expression"; yet a little further on in the same work, the introduction to the poems of Blake, Professor Raleigh writes of "the academic processes of verbal education" that "they submit even the imagination to a civil and social discipline, and compel the bard to express himself with a decent respect for the intellectual habits of his fellow men. This classic discipline, which has never yet, by itself, been the making of a good poet, but which has saved the world from the pretentious follies of many a dunce and the brilliant futilities of many a man of genius, was exactly what Blake most needed." It was needed, in fact, to save Blake from "essential faults of expression." No one of course can pretend that "academic processes" of education are necessary to the writing of poetry; but neither, on the other hand, is the mere emotional instinct sufficient. The artist must be self-sacrificing as well as assertive—he must find himself

"Enamoured of the difficult mountain air  
Up Beauty's hill of prayer."

"The dutiful and laborious execution of a long task originally conceived in a happy moment of insight, was impossible to Blake. To continue working when the fever-fit was overblown would have been to work without conviction and possibly without meaning." So Professor Raleigh; yet surely the condemnation of much of Blake's work lies in that one word "dutiful."



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Art is a duty, and must be as such regarded. To write a lyric in a swift burst of happy inspiration is no doubt possible; no doubt lyrics are frequently so written; yet it is as true of poetry as of life, and perhaps not least of lyric poetry, that

"tasks in hours of insight will'd  
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd."

It has been said that careful slowness of composition does not preclude immediacy of inspiration. And in any case criticism must stop short of declaring how inspiration works or what composition is; probably not even the artist knows his own secret; it has been written of the muse—

"Somewhat of all things sealed and recondite  
Save the enigma of herself she knows."

What criticism is adequate to do has been suggested by the passages quoted from Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" and from Myers's essay on Virgil. There is to be determined a certain correspondence of matter and form, of purpose and the means of expression. No one can say precisely what each of these is nor how their correspondence is created; how much can be said, however, is defined by Dr. Bradley in his "Poetry for Poetry's Sake." "We have first," he writes, "an antithesis of subject and poem. This is clear and valid; and the question in which of them does the value lie is intelligible; and its answer is, In the poem. We have next a distinction of substance and form. If the substance means ideas, images, and the like, taken alone, and the form means the measured language taken by itself, this is a possible distinction, but it is a distinction of things not in the poem, and the value lies in neither of them."



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If substance and form mean anything in the poem, the each is involved in the other, and the question in which of them the value lies has no sense. . . . What is the gist of Pater's teaching about style, if it is not that in the end the one value of style is truth or adequacy; that the word, phrase, sentence, should express perfectly the writer's perception, feeling, image, or thought; so that, as we read a descriptive phrase of Keats's, we exclaim, 'That is the thing itself'; so that, to quote Arnold, the words are 'symbols equivalent with the thing symbolised,' or, in our technical language, a form identical with its content? Hence in true poetry it is, in strictness, impossible to express the meaning in any but its own words, and to change the words without changing the meaning. A translation of such poetry is not really the old meaning in a fresh dress; it is a new product, something like the poem, though, if one chooses to say so, more like it in the aspect of meaning than in the aspect of form. . . . And yet, when all is said, the question will recur, though now in quite another sense, What does poetry mean? This unique expression, which cannot be replaced by any other, still seems to be trying to express something beyond itself. And this we feel is also what the other arts, and religion, and philosophy are trying to express; and that is what impels us to seek in vain to translate the one into the other. About the best poetry, and not only the best, there floats an atmosphere of infinite suggestion. The poet speaks to us of one thing, but in this one thing there seems to lurk the secret of all. He said what he meant, but his meaning seems to beckon away beyond itself, or rather to expand into something boundless which is only focussed in it; something also which, we feel,

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would satisfy not only the imagination, but the whole of us; that something within us, and without, which everywhere

'makes us seem

To patch up fragments of a dream,  
Part of which comes true, and part  
Beats and trembles in the heart.'

Those who are susceptible to this effect of poetry find it not only, perhaps not most, in the ideals which she has sometimes described, but in a child's song by Christina Rossetti about a mere crown of wind-flowers, and in tragedies like *Lear* where the sun seems to have set for ever. They hear this spirit murmuring its undertone through the *Æneid*, and catch its voice in the song of Keats's nightingale, and its light upon the figures on the Urn, and it pierces them no less in Shelley's hopeless lament *O world, O life, O time*, than in the rapturous ecstasy of his *Life of Life*. This all-embracing perfection cannot be expressed in poetic words or in words of any kind, nor yet in music or in colour, but the suggestion of it is in much poetry, if not all, and poetry has in this suggestion, this 'meaning,' a great part of its value. We do it wrong, and we defeat our own purposes when we try to bend it to them:—

'We do it wrong, being so majestic,  
To offer it the show of violence;  
For it is as the air invulnerable,  
And our vain blows malicious mockery.'

It is a spirit. It comes we know not whence. It will not speak at our bidding, nor answer in our language. It is not our servant; it is our master." How impotent even a profound critic may be to render an account of



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poetic method is illustrated by Wordsworth's analysis of his own poetical aims and effects. He comments with a delightful solemnity on his poem to the Cuckoo. Having quoted—

“ Shall I call thee bird  
Or but a wandering voice ? ”

he proceeds : “ This concise interrogation characterises the seeming ubiquity of the voice of the cuckoo, and dispossesses the creature almost of a corporeal existence; the imagination being tempted to this exertion of her power by a consciousness in the memory that the cuckoo is almost perpetually heard throughout the season of spring, but seldom becomes an object of sight.” Yes; but what is it that makes those lines good poetry? The imagination successfully performs the function allotted to it, but it ministers thereby to something greater. Similarly the analysis of purpose which was quoted from Wordsworth leaves something essential unsaid, though it suggests it. Indeed, we are brought back to Matthew Arnold's definition of poetry by reverting to the fact that criticism suggests what can never be said about poetry, even as poetry suggests what can never be said about life. Of why ultimately he wants to write, what ultimately he means to say, the poet himself must always remain not quite accurately sure.

“ Alas ! what boots it with incessant care  
To tend the homely slighted Shepherd's trade,  
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse ? ”

And so Swinburne to the dead Baudelaire :—

“ There is no help for these things ; none to mend  
And none to mar ; not all our songs, O friend,  
Will make death clear or make life durable.”



Gaylord

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But on the other hand we have to set that high and  
conscious purpose—

“To justify the ways of God to men.”

Conscious or not, some such instinct of prophecy is  
common to all poets—a contention that may be sup-  
ported by an appeal to the subject-matter of poetry.  
For though in a sense anything may form such subject-  
matter, it does so, if trivial in itself, only by being  
brought under the head of some profounder theme.  
“It is surely true,” to quote again from Dr. Bradley,  
“that we cannot determine beforehand what subjects  
are fit for Art, or name any subject on which a good  
poem might not possibly be written. To divide subjects  
into two groups, the beautiful or elevating, and the  
ugly or vicious, and to judge poems according as their  
subjects belong to one of these groups or the other, is  
to confuse with our preconceptions the meaning of the  
poet. What the thing is in the poem he is to be judged  
by, not by the thing as it was before he touched it; and  
how can we venture to say beforehand that he cannot  
make a true poem out of something which to us was  
merely alluring or dull or revolting?” But few of  
the greatest and most memorable poems are as a matter  
of fact about things trivial in themselves. If seas and  
stars were going to become hackneyed, they would  
have done so long ago; as subjects of poetry they are  
as eternal as poetry itself, as seas and stars themselves.  
Originality does not consist in avoiding the known and  
tried; it is hard to say in what it does consist in that  
sense in which it is essential for good art. The  
quatrains, for instance, of Fitzgerald have the ring of  
authentic poetry; their quality of essential originality

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is unaffected by the fact that they are a translation or adaptation. What it is that constitutes the true goodness, the ultimate originality—that is of course the old and permanent question. Browning surely treats the critical difficulty too lightly when he makes Abt Vogler say—

“ Had I written the same, made verse—still, effect  
proceeds from cause,  
Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the  
tale is told ;  
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to  
laws.”

Surely what is in this poem claimed for music alone is true of all the arts equally ; it is of artistic expression as a whole, not of music only, that Browning, leaving the mystery illumined but unexplained, should say—

“ But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that  
can,  
Existent behind all laws, that made them and lo,  
they are !  
And I know not if, save in this, such grace be allowed  
to man,  
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth  
sound, but a star.”

Now this permanence throughout literature of one purpose, of one range of subjects, it might almost be said of one point of view, brings us no less than the theory of the accumulated meaning in words as a main factor in literary expression, to a solution of our problem about the relation between actual and historical value. For the problem itself appears to arise from a mis-

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ception. The fact is that we cannot say, "If So-and-so had lived in a different century he would have written in such-and-such a manner," for he would not have been So-and-so. His literary heritage would have been different, the air he breathed full of different quotations, different thoughts and different ways of pressing them; the furniture of his mind would have been different. The very being and nature of a man, whether as man or as poet, depends obviously upon the age in which he lives to a large extent at any rate; whereas in poetry there is something absolute, defying time, as if the laws of environment were broken through and in unison with the ultimate effected—"the perfect sound" attained in the heaven of song. But how far are we to say that this is really to break through materials? How far is it simply to use them? The analogy of the freedom of the will would seem to hold. A man's conditions are always given; but within those conditions he is conscious of free will, of the possibility of a spontaneous, unique, original, and creative act. The borderland is hard to fix. He is not free to add a cubit to his stature, but under certain impulses he can, so to speak, outstrip his possibilities. So with poetry the limit of what can be done under given conditions, in a given era, is hard to fix. When we say of a poem early in date that it strikes a modern note, we tend to imply that it would not be so remarkable if written now—to lay stress on the historical value. But so long as it is *merely* that, it is either an accident or a cleverness, a feat of precocity; the absolute value is all that matters. If that is not there, it cannot to even the smallest extent be replaced by any remarkableness in the poem having been written



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so early. It is not as if the merely being modern were in itself necessarily and wholly good. We have gained it is true, in experience, in self-criticism, in accumulation of instances; but we have also lost an indefinable something.

“It is not now as it hath been of yore.”

The human race cannot sing “each song twice over,”  
nor

“recapture

The first fine careless rapture.”

If the poet of to-day can write as no Carolan poet could have done, quite as surely have we lost the touch that was theirs. Just as we put down to precocity any instance of writing by an early poet that is only modern in accent and no more,—has not that is to say that tone which is modern and classical at once, with all the virtues of both, “not of an age, but for all time”—so we talk of affectation and conscious archaism when a modern poet writes like an early one. Not, of course, that it is impossible for a single poet now and then to arise who stands apart from his contemporaries; some people are born out of their time. But even so the general spirit of the age cannot altogether be avoided by any one. The poet, moreover, is often a conscious critic of present and past movements; from Sidney to Arnold many great poets have written of their conception of poetry, and this critical and discursive tendency is more than ever active to-day. Originality in the ordinary sense is fast becoming an impossibility; but we have seen that that is not the sense in which a poem needs to be original. Originality, so far as it consists in not knowing what has been said before, or in the fact of there not having been said anything to know, is not only

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unattainable in a complex civilisation, but undesirable at all times. Nor is the true, the requisite, originality only a case of—

“What oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed”; it covers an actual gain in significance through other people having used the language. It is largely through accumulated use that the poet can get his effect; for the use has been accumulated for the reader also. And so we come back to the truth that in a sense poetry tells us only what we know already, or rather, that the materials of knowledge are within us for the poet to transfuse and illumine. The reader contributes understanding, acceptance, estimation. Art is thus relative; no man is an artist by himself and to himself. But none the less the worth and standard of worth in it are objective and absolute; if this were not so, there would be no possibility of the artist and his audience each going to it for the truth and each finding, within the limitations set by varying personality, the same truth. The special relevance of this study of art in general to the nature of lyric is twofold. In the first place, by its very nature, the lyric illustrates most strikingly those elements of artistic expression on which stress has been laid; it is splendid and single and wonderful; but for this reason it lays itself open to a misconstruction of the way in which art necessarily works—a misconstruction exemplified in the false use and sense of the term “spontaneity.” Just because of its singleness and brightness, the lyric has often been thought of as separate, as impossibly individual, as outside the laws of poetry and the traditions of thought and language. And in the second place, in the history of lyric poetry in England we find as good an example as could be of the contrast



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between the true and the false originality. For it presents unity in diversity; there is the one note, from the earliest to the latest poem, preserved through countless shapes; there is the single something which accepts influences, uses materials, adapts and yet creates. We can trace up to the point of each act of creation all the preceding thoughts and phrases; and in each case the act results in a strain inexplicably new. The best text for a consideration of what originality means is the Elizabethan lyric; but the same lesson is plain throughout our literature. Modes of thought and of expression have come over in waves from the Continent, and origins can be clearly and extensively traced. No doubt in all countries alike the primal impulse to lyrical utterance suffices, without any extraneous aid, to begin; but it is the groundwork for many modifications. Of the very beginnings of song Mr. E. K. Chambers has the following passage: "The written lyric of the Middle Ages is generally the work of the minstrel or of the *trouvère*, who represent successive stages in the development of the poet as a self-conscious artist. Both naturally write down their songs; the minstrel to aid his own memory and to preserve a professional stock-in-trade, which he may wish to sell or lend to another; the *trouvère* out of creative vanity, to secure from his friends and from those who come after him the

'monumentum ære perennius.'

But beyond *trouvère*-song and beyond minstrelsy lies the folk-song out of which they both grew, and which long continues to exist side by side with them. Folk-song is rarely written down, at least until it has already



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been contaminated with literary elements; and the reconstruction of its primitive features by the disentangling of these elements, with what aid history, psychology, and the comparative study of barbarous peoples may afford, is an important function of the anthropologist. His investigations trace the beginnings of the lyric to the instinct of emotional self-expression, rhythmic with these quickened dilations and contractions of the heart which are the physiological accompaniments of emotion. Such expression proves to be readily punctuated by the external rhythms of folk-activities which occupy the limbs and leave the spirit free to brood or to exult; rhythms of labour, in the pulling of the oar, the swing of the sickle or the flail, the rock of the cradle, the rise and fall of the batlet, the twisting of the spindle, the throw of the shuttle in the loom; or rhythms of play, when the nervous energies, released from the ordinary claims, are diverted into unremunerative channels, and under the rare stimulus of meat and wine the idle feet of the chorus, grouped around the altar of sacrifice or the fruit-laden tree, break into the uplifting of the dance." Gradually the difference arose between the one who leads the song, and the chorus, just as we have it in the history of Greek tragedy; then the one man begins to make verses of his own personal interests, and the lyric has arisen, retaining for long the refrain as a mark of its origin. "The earliest written love-poetry of the northern *trouvères* discovers art-song," writes Mr. Chambers further, "in the very act of passing out of the *cantica diabolica amatoria et turpia* of *rustici* and *rusticanae* in the *ballationes* of their holiday *chori*. . . . The second half of the twelfth century, in which the

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texts begin, already acknowledges the establishment under Provençal influence of that official *chanson d'amour* or *chanson courtois*, which ultimately succeeded in impressing itself upon the imagination of the Renaissance no less than upon that of the Middle Ages, and may be said to have fixed the type of romantic sentiment from the *Canzoniere* of Petrarch to *The A in the House*." This *chanson courtois* is the basis of all that conventional and Platonic love-making which is traceable through Petrarch and the Elizabethans. Some of the earliest English songs have been preserved with their music, and the connection of singing and dancing with the forms of verse seems to have been close.

These forms both in France and England were largely determined by the rhyming Latin hymns; religious and amorous poetry overlap curiously; the *clerici vagantes* were largely the authors of both, and we find the Virgin Mary addressed in language closely resembling that used by the *trouvères* to their mistress.

"Of on that is so fayr and bright  
*Velud maris stella,*  
 Brighter than the day is light,  
*Parens et puella ;*  
 Ic crie to the, thou se to me,  
 Levedy, preyè thi sone for me,  
*Tam pia,*  
 That ic mote comè to the,  
*Maria !*"

The Latin tags are a relic of the rhyming verses in that language; we get also poems that make use of three or several tongues—



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*"Scripsi hæc carmina in tabulis ;*  
 Mon ostel est en mi la vile de Paris.  
 May y sugge namore, so wel me is !  
 Yef hi deye for love of her, duel hit ys."

or again—

"A celuy que pluys eyne en mounde,  
 Of allè tho that I have found,  
     *Carissima,*  
 Saluz od treyé amour,  
 With grace and joye and alle honour,  
     *Dulcissima."*

Thus already the national need of artistic expression was finding forms, under French and Provençal influence, which bear a striking resemblance to the modern lyric, so much more variously influenced, historically so much more remote from the native impulse of the folk, and yet surely not less national. Two further extracts may be quoted—like the three preceding, from the text of Messrs. Chambers and Sidgwick—to show how already in these early lyrics the external form, from whatever source derived, has been fused and made one with the native spirit of the folk-song, and how the traces of various influences in metre and in language, though they may be distinguished and noted, are powerless to mar the effect of artistic unity and inspired spontaneity. The first is from a love-song :—

"Bytuené Mersh ant Averil,  
 When spray biginneth to springe,  
 The lutel foul hath hire wyl  
 On hyre lud to syng.  
 Ich libbe in love-longinge  
 For semlokest of allè thinge ;  
 He may me blisse bringe ;



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Icham in hire baundoun,  
 An hendy hap ichabbe yhent ;  
 Ichot from hevene it is me sent ;  
 From allè wymmen mi love is lent  
 Ant lyht on Alysoun."

The second combines the imagery of love-poetry with the deep feeling of a religion firmly held and passionately believed :—

"In a valey of this restles minde  
 I soughte in mounteine and in mede,  
 Trusting a trewe love for to finde.  
 Upon an hill than I took hede ;  
 A voice I herde, and neer I yede,  
 In huge dolour complaininge tho,  
 'See, derè soule, how my sides blede,  
*Quia amore langueo.*'

What schall I do with my fair spouse,  
 But abide her of my gentilness,  
 Till that sche loke out of her house  
 Of fleischly affeccoun ? Love mine sche is.  
 Her bed is made, her bolster is bliss,  
 Her chaumber is chosen ; is there none mo ?  
 Loke out on me at the window of kindeness,  
*Quia amore langueo.*"

"Certainly," says Mr. Chambers, "the English poems have their affinities to the *chanson populaire* as well as to the *chanson courtois*. They derive, indeed, not from the courtly heyday of *trouvère* poetry so much as from the aftermath, itself touched with popular elements, which was produced amongst the great bourgeois towns of Northern France." But, obscure as the

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derivation may be, the point is that it is there. The Latin and the Continental influences are at work; we see where the methods come from. Of course, as has already been insisted, there is in any work of art a novelty, an act of creation, as well as the utilisation of materials to hand—but it is a striking fact that the English lyric, a form so vital and so individual, should exhibit during the early centuries of its development an almost shameless willingness to borrow manner alike and matter from abroad, till we are left wondering as to how and where the originality can have entered in. Chaucer and his immediate followers, in so far as they were lyrical, were French. The fifteenth-century ballads and carols are more of the soil; but, for all the completeness of craftsmanship shown in the middle English lyric, it is with Wyatt and Surrey that the modern lyric begins, and Wyatt and Surrey again drew their inspiration from abroad. "In the latter end of the same King's [Henry VIII] raigne sprang vp a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir *Thomas Wyat* th' elder and *Henry Earle of Surrey* were the two chieftaines, who hauing travailed into *Italie*, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie as nouices newly crept out of the schooles of *Dante Arioste* and *Petrarch*, they greatly polished our rude and homely maner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had bene before, and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile." Mr. Wyadham in his book on the *Pléiade* attaches less importance to these poets. "Wyatt and Surrey," he says, "who turned to these Italian models in the earlier years of the sixteenth century, failed to assimilate them, and did little in the way either of remaking the English



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language or reviving lyrics. The poets who effected these objects for England, as the Pléiade had effected them for France, praised and dismissed Surrey and Wyatt, the 'courtly makers,' just as Ronsard had bowed out his precursors of François I's court. But they were familiar alike with the Pléiade's practice and with their preaching. They proceeded to a study of Italian from a knowledge of French, and received Italian poetry through the medium of French art. Thus transmuted it could be assimilated, and this was done by English poets, who echo the music of the Pléiade's verse and repeat their critical conclusions in literary manifestoes." What Mr. Wyndham means by the praise bestowed on Wyatt and Surrey by their successors is illustrated in Sidney's Apologie, where it is said of Surrey's lyrics that they contain "many things tasting of a noble birth, and worthie of a noble mind." It is noticeable that there are very few other poets exempted by Sidney from his general attack; he approves Chaucer, the "Mirour of Magistrates," the "Shepherd's Kalender," and Gorboduc, besides Surrey himself; and of these five only Surrey and Spenser are lyrical. The latter was of course very largely under French influence, conspicuously that of Marot; but Surrey's masters were Italian, and to Italy therefore we must confess a considerable debt, even apart from its indirect working through the French. Professor Raleigh speaks in a tone not quite reconcilable with Mr. Wyndham's: "The strength of the school of Surrey lay in its songs, which never miss the essentials of verse that is to be wedded to music. Even the dullest of the poets of that school understand a lyrical movement, while the best of them can breathe



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ch strains as Wyatt's ravishing song, with the burden  
My lute, be still, for I have done,' or Gascoigne's  
Beautiful Lullaby." "The University wits," writes  
Professor Raleigh further, "... maintained the lyrical  
tradition in all its fulness"; and indeed the tradition  
is clearly traceable as one. for all the importation of new  
forms of thought and language, there is something which  
binds together the verses quoted above from medieval  
lyric with Wyatt and Surrey, with Sidney and Spenser,  
with Milton and with the moderns; there is the un-  
mistakable and single note. The variety and multitude  
of sources that went to make up the Elizabethan lyric,  
and be in it subdued to agreement with the whole  
stream of English song, may be suggested by a quotation  
from Mr. Wyndham's account of the sources drawn upon  
by the Pléiade; for that in its turn, as he has shown,  
was drawn upon very largely by the Elizabethans.  
"In the first place, they valued the best of mediæval  
French verse. They knew their thirteenth century...  
they enjoyed the heritage of mediæval French verse,  
which, as Matthew Arnold has truly said, 'took posses-  
sion of the heart and imagination of Europe in the  
twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and taught Chaucer  
his trade, words, rhyme, and metre.'... In the second  
place, coming to French poetry which immediately  
preceded their own, they knew and appreciated Clement  
Marot, Mellin de St. Gellais, Hœret, and Maurice Scève.  
In the third place, having travelled much in Italy, they  
knew Petrarch by heart, and helped themselves, no  
doubt freely, to his material. But du Bellay wrote  
'contre les Petrarquists'; Ronsard attacked courtiers  
'qui n'admirent qu'un petit sonnet Petrarquisé';  
and both were justified in this repudiation. The method

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of their verse was distinct from the method of Italian verse, and, passing from form to matter, they strike a note of plaintive mystery, which is not to be heard in Petrarch. In the fourth place, besides the direct influence from Italy, they receive an indirect influence already transfigured by the School of Lyons, and notably by Maurice Scève, whose *Délie* is rather an anagram of *l'Idée*, the Platonic idea of beauty, than a title borrowed from the *Delia* whom Tibullus loved. . . . In the fifth place, they had all the Latin authors at their finger-ends. Yet they knew them for literary echoes . . . and so, lastly, they deliberately sought their inspiration in the fullest measure from the Greeks. . . . Since their main intention was lyric, their chief model was Pindar." A full account of how much English literature owes to these multitudinous sources is given in Mr. Sidney Lee's Introduction to his edition of Elizabethan sonnets. "One is accustomed," he says, "to regard the literary energy of sixteenth-century England as mainly a national movement, as an outburst of original thought which owed little to foreign influence or suggestion. No student can advance far in his investigation in any direction, least of all in the direction of the Elizabethan lyric, without seriously qualifying this impression. As soon as one closely compares the tone and language of the Elizabethan lyric with those of the lyric in France and Italy during the same epoch, or in the epoch immediately preceding the Elizabethan, as soon as one realises the persistent intercourse between Elizabethan England and the cultivated nations of Europe, one is brought to the conclusion that the Elizabethan lyric, in nearly all its varied shapes of song and sonnet, was, to a very large



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extent, directly borrowed from foreign lands. It may be safely predicated that, had not foreign literature supplied the initiative and the example, the Elizabethan lyric would not have come into being, at any rate in the shape which is familiar to us. Our ancestors often improved conspicuously on their foreign models; they gave fuller substance, fuller beauty to the poetry which they adapted to their own tongue from Latin or Greek, from French or Italian. But the inspiration, the invention, is no purely English product. The English renderings are as a rule too literal borrowings to be reckoned, in a justly critical estimate, among wholly original compositions." Again, Mr. Lee refers to "the familiar conceits—how the lady's lips make the roses red, how the eye and heart accuse each other of causing Love's wounds, how verse has the faculty of immortalising its hero or heroine." A much longer list could be made; England took over from France and Italy a whole equipment of literary phraseology. The Elizabethans wrote of little but love, and their love was almost entirely a pose. It needed not Mr. Lee's researches into origins to prove the conventional nature of all this verse; we have Sidney's express testimony, recorded at the time both in his prose and in his poetry. "That *Lyricall* kinde of songs and Sonnets, which, Lord, if he gaue vs so good mindes, how well it might be employed, and with how heauenly fruites, both priuate and publike, in singing the prayses of the immortall beautie, the immortall goodnesse of that God, who giueth vs hands to write, and wits to conceiue; of which wee might well want words, but neuer matter: of which wee could turne our eyes to nothing, but wee should euer have new budding occasions. But truly many



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such writings as come vnder the banner of vnresistable loue, if I were a mistresse, would neuer perswade mee they were in loue : so coldly they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read louers writings, and so caught vp certaine swelling phrases, which hang together, like a man that once told me the wind was at North-west and by South, because hee would bee sure to name winds enow, then that in truth they feelee those passions, which easily as I thinke, may be bewrayed by that same forcibleness or *Energia* (as the Greekes call it) of the writer." And so in his poetry—more familiar perhaps in modernised spelling:—

"Some lovers speak when they their Muses entertain,  
Of hopes begot by fear, of wot not what desires,  
Of force of heavenly beams infusing hellish pain,  
Of living deaths, dear wounds, fair storms and freezing  
fires.

Some one his song, in Jove and Jove's strange tales  
attires ;

Bordered with bulls and swans, powdered with golden  
rain :

Another humbler wit to shepherd's pipe retires,  
Yet hiding royal blood full oft in rural vein.

To some a sweetest plaint, a sweetest style affords ;  
While tears pour out his ink, and sighs breathe out his  
words :

His paper, pale despair ; and pain, his pen doth move.  
I can speak what I feel, and feel as much as they ;  
But think that all the map of my state I display,  
When trembling voice brings forth, that I do Stella  
love."

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Or again :—

" You that do search for every purling spring  
Which from the ribs of old Parnassus flows :  
And every flower, not sweet perhaps, which grows  
Near thereabouts, into your poesy wring :  
You that do dictionary's methods bring  
Into your rhymes running in rattling rows ;  
You that poor Petrarch's long-deceasèd woes,  
With new-born sighs and denizenèd wit do sing :  
You take wrong ways ! Those far-fet helps be such  
As do bewray a want of inward touch ;  
And sure at length, stolen goods do come to light.  
But if (both for your love and skill) your name  
You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame :  
Stella behold ! and then begin to endite."

Mrs. Meynell has set forth and interpreted the convention : " The lady of the lyrics was not loved in mortal earnest, and her punishment now and then for her ingratitude was to be told that she was loved in jest. She did not love ; her fancy was fickle ; she was not moved by long service, which, by the way, was evidently to be taken for granted precisely like the whole long past of a dream. She had not a good temper. When the poet groans it seems that she has laughed at him ; when he flouts her, we may understand that she has chidden her lyrist in no temperate terms. In doing this she has sinned not so much against him as against Love. With that she is perpetually reproved. The Lyrist complains to Love, pities Love for her scorning, and threatens to go away with Love, who is on his side. The sweetest verse is tuned to love when the loved one proves worthy." It was from her close



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dependence upon musical setting, too, that the lady of the lyrics got much of her unreality as well as much of her charm. Says Mrs. Meynell again: "Fair as a lily, hard to please, easily angry, ungrateful for innumerable verses, uncertain with the regularity of the madrigal, and inconstant with the punctuality of a stanza, she has gone with the arts of that day; and neither verse nor music will ever make such another lady. She refused to observe the transiency of the rose; she never really intended—much as she was urged—to be a shepherdess; she was never persuaded to mitigate her dress. In return, the world has let her disappear. She scorned the poets until they turned upon her in the epigram of many a final couplet; and of these the last has long been written. Her 'No' was set to counter-point in the part-song, and she frightened Love out of her sight in the ballet. Those occupations are gone, and the lovely Elizabethan has slipped away. She was something less than mortal." But to say that the age was conventional is not to say that it lacked ardour, youth, spontaneity. If its art is conscious in the sense of being carefully imitative, at any rate there is none of that self-consciousness which prevents the meagrely-gifted from trying their hand at the prevailing fashion. "Every youth of ordinary education," says Mr. Lee, "was moved to woo the muses in a sequence of sonnets." And again: "In spite of the wide dissemination of literary interest and literary feeling in Elizabethan England, the average level of literary capacity was not much higher than that of other epochs. It was consequently inevitable that, when the rage for sonneteering set in among the Elizabethans, the mass of their sonneteering efforts



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should be bad." But to write sonnets at all—at any rate for "every youth of ordinary education" to do so—is a sign that the nation itself is vigorous and young, as yet untroubled by any excess of the critical spirit; the writers do not

"understand  
How hard it is to write."

That the lyrists were almost wholly, in a sense, unoriginal, has been conclusively proved by Mr. Lee. It may be noted in connection with this fact that many of them wrote merely for their own pleasure, not for profit or for the praise of the multitude; they did it because they liked doing it, and if they published, it was because apparently the public liked the result, or, as in several instances it certainly was, because piratical publishers forestalled them and forced their hands. Such was the case with Sidney and with Daniel; thus were the sonnets of Shakespeare given to the world. But beyond doubt in the Elizabethan lyric we have the question of originality in its acutest form. The very fact that people did write to please themselves calls attention to another fact, one of profound importance, which underlies much literary activity. It is that, as has been said above, the difference between the poet and the layman is not in understanding so much as in power of expression. True, in poetry the very power of expression becomes one, as it were, with understanding; it is just because he cannot express articulately what he understands that we say of a man that he does not understand it. But this does not affect the immediate issue. It has already been urged that there are very few things in life which, in the last resort, inspire poetry; they might perhaps all be summed up

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under the two words "love" and "death." At any rate, so to sum them up would be justifiable to the extent implied by admitting the essential relation of love and death with everything for which we greatly care; for it is only of the things for which we greatly care that we want poetry. If we run over in our minds what is nearest to our memories in the poetry we know, those two ideas will be immanent in all the passages we remember. It is equally true and not in the least contradictory to say—what Dr. Bradley has been quoted above as saying—that poetry can be written of anything; for to write poetry of the meanest thing is to bring it into immediate touch with the great, the embracing things. This is the truth behind all Wordsworth's critical writing. "Poetry," he says, "is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man." It is the poet's business, like the philosopher's, to discover the universal in the particular, like Wordsworth's child, he is—

" Haunted for ever by the eternal mind " ;

like Vaughan's, he feels—

" through all this fleshly dress  
Bright shoots of everlastingness."

But—and here is the point—every one is in touch with that eternal mind, conscious in pangs and moments of that everlastingness. Hence the desire to produce poetry. Writing may of course be a merely academic exercise; and when it repeats old thoughts in familiar figures, it is readily—perhaps too readily—taken to be merely that. But the impulse to write is something bigger and more profound, if not in every particular



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case, at least in a nation great and lusty like the England of the sixteenth century. Men had to be doing, for that was in the air, it was the spirit of the age; equally little did they tire of writing. Every one is familiar with moments when the desire to write something which shall "all-express" him is terribly and insistently strong, but is baffled by the inability to think out with clearness anything but what he knows to be written down elsewhere, adequate in black and white. But that was not going to check the Elizabethans; they would not be reconciled with their own inability. There is justification for the way in which they approached this matter. Over and above that broad truth of the ultimate fewness of real subjects for artistic treatment, we find the narrower and more surprising truth, that the same minor sentiment is capable of worthy reproduction, over and over again, in one period or in various periods—that the same little thought may be constantly caught up, and embodied in words that no doubt vary in their beauty and sufficiency, and yet in some cases at any rate justify themselves on more occasions than one. There are some thoughts which of their nature we should expect to put on many beautiful forms, each of course in a sense new and original; the pathos of mortality is so urgent and omnipresent that it presses for expression even after the incomparable verses of Catullus:—

"Soles occidere et redire possunt :  
Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux  
Nox est perpetua una dormienda."

This, we recognise, is one of those more majestic and far-reaching sentiments to which we should expect the Muse



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presumably more reason for them than can be allowed to the conventional ones of his contemporaries. "Something new," writes Mr. Gosse, "in English literature begins in Donne, something which proceeded, under his potent influence, to colour poetry for nearly a hundred years. . . . The imitation of Donne's style begins so early, and becomes so general, that several critics have taken for granted that there must have been editions of his writings which have disappeared." And again: "Donne was, I venture to suggest, by far the most modern and contemporaneous of the writers of his time. He rejected all the classical tags and imagery of the Elizabethans, he borrowed nothing from French or Italian tradition. . . . His poems are full of images taken from the life and habits of the time. Where earlier poets have summoned the myths of Greece to adorn their verse, Donne weaves in, instead, the false zoology, the crude physics and philosophy, of his own fermenting epoch." Donne perhaps more than any other author forces confession of the truth that conceit is not a bad thing in itself; it can be as much as anything else an instrument for the self-expression of genius. There is no essential antagonism between simplicity and conceits; both are legitimate means, and both produce on occasion beautiful results. Both can at times be ugly—when, as Wordsworth said, "the matter is contemptible." Pope, for instance, though often most poetical when simplest, is often again simple enough without conveying the impression of poetical inspiration—and that not with any laboured or obviously artificial simplicity, but by a straightforward handling of commonplace themes. Conceit may be regarded as of two kinds—it is either a convention

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deteriorating into an excess, or the attempt of the active mind to come to close quarters with its thought. This latter and more essential kind shows the connection with a wider question. Of all literary eccentricity and mannerism it may be said that where it is consciously assumed as such, it is vicious; where it fits the thought, it is none the worse for being different and unusual. Meredith is the most consistent example of this in English prose; nor is it less true of his poetry, though both he and Browning give rise to the suspicion that perhaps at their simplest they are best. Meredith can be sweet and direct when he chooses—as for example in “Love in the Valley.” So could Crashaw and Cowley, Herbert and Vaughan. Perhaps out of every violent or obscure poet it is the sudden clarity and the obvious beauties that endure; what remains to the ear and the soul out of the absorbing intricacies of “The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady” is the pure and liquid line—

“ Her eyes were the sweet world desired of souls ”;

out of the welter of Sordello abide the lines in which—

“ the grieved and obscure waters slope  
Into a darkness quieted by hope.”

But memory may thus apportion praise without doing wrong to the just claims of mannerism and of conceit. If simplicity can do what these cannot, they in their turn have their own work; and, when they are of the right kind, they do it well. Critics have drawn a contrast between the difficulty entailed in such rapid and versatile thought as Browning's and the bad,



bombastic, unnecessary, overloaded obscurity of certain Elizabethans. Wither brought a similar charge—

“As the sun doth oft exhale  
Vapours from each rotten vale,  
Poesy so sometimes drains  
Gross conceits from muddy brains.”

It all depends on how the thing is done. The conventional conceit may be handled deftly or clumsily, the conceit arising from activity of mind may be successful or not; further, conceits of one kind may be transformed by force of poetic feeling into conceits of another. Nothing is more common throughout the Elizabethans than a somewhat unconvincing exaggeration; but an apparently similar trick ceases in the hands of Shakespeare to be unconvincing, and becomes the vehicle of passion. So with Donne—as for instance:—

“Thou art so true that thoughts of thee suffice  
To make dreams truth and fables histories.”

Cowley's first Anacreontic is a curious example of an extravagant conceit converted by lightness of touch and dexterity of treatment into something which strikes the mind as quite natural and straightforward—

“The sea itself (which one would think  
Should have but little need of drink)  
Drinks twice ten thousand rivers up.

The moon and stars drink up the Sun :  
They drink and dance by their own light,  
They drink and revel all the night :  
Nothing in nature's sober found,  
But an eternal health goes round.

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Fill up the bowl, then, fill it high,  
Fill all the glasses there—for why  
Should every creature drink but I?  
Why, man of morals, tell me why?"

Donne in his famous "Ecstasy" affords an instance of a poet so violently compelled by what he wants to say that he, as it were, smashes through the very conceits he set out to use; in each of these we feel the insufficiency, are conscious of the idea struggling within the inadequate metaphor, until at last the true sense triumphs in lines of absolute simplicity—

"All day the same our postures were,  
And we said nothing, all the day."

The effect is attained, but not by the mere simplicity, nor yet by the force of contrast; the accumulation of conceits is an essential of the artistic whole. Like all the media of artistic expression, that is to say, the conceits have become something other, something new; for, as Dr. Bradley has said, "anything which is really a mere 'conceit' is mere decoration"; and mere decoration is inartistic, is bad. Badness and clumsiness were largely, however, despite the extravagancies of certain poets, eliminated in the period immediately preceding the Puritan by the interaction of various tendencies, which culminated in an almost unrivalled mastery of lyrical art. There was the Spenserian; there was the critical, suggested in Sidney and emphasised in the "metaphysical" school and in the definitely and intentionally classical restraint of Jonson. These tendencies overlapped and mingled, and the crown and flower of them was Milton; he had the



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knowledge of many literatures, the gift of borrowing and improving what he borrowed, the necessary obedience to the precept and example of the classics, the command of metaphor, the lyric touch, the critical spirit to discern what was poetical, what essential, and what not; he had the inexplicable transforming power of the poet. We may apply to him the phrase found for another poet—

"Singer to whom the singing ages climb  
Convergent."

But if Milton is the complex result of all these tendencies, and "blends, transcends them all," Herrick, his contemporary, may rather be said to have distilled from the wealth at his disposal than to have utilised it directly. He is not "metaphysical," nor is he the slave of conventional conceit; he has got rid of useless ornament, and is left playing with the sweetness of his own fancy alone. He is the master of "fancy," in Wordsworth's sense, as opposed to the more august and austere gift of imagination. He has in perfection that quality which chiefly distinguishes the Carolan lyrists as a whole—the grace, the ease, the lucidity, the exactness, the epigrammatic point and finish. All this is the result, partly no doubt of reaction from Elizabethan opulence and turbulence, but also directly of Elizabethan melody and charm. By much enthusiasm, by many attempts, by long self-criticism, the formal part of poetry had attained to this precision. Not that anything had

"Made poetry a mere mechanic art";

for the Carolan lyric could never have been produced without the subjective impulse to song; its very lilt

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tells us as much. There are certain kinds of architectural effect which can be attained by taking thought ; the ring of the couplet, the solemnity of blank verse, worthless and hollow as they are by themselves, may yet by themselves exist, unilluminated by the sacred spark ; but there has to be a mood corresponding to the formal measure and infusing life into it before one gets—

“ Then this immensive cup  
Of aromatic wine,  
Catullus, I'll quaff up  
To that terse muse of thine.”

Here is Herrick at his most trivial, making no attempt to sound the greater depths of feeling, as, however, he was well able to do when he chose ; but the syllables themselves are stamped with something final and satisfying, something which is the seal of true art. Herrick could move freely and write adequately without conceits ; but when he does use them, they are neither far-fetched nor hackneyed ; they never fall short and never overreach themselves ; they are exactly in tune with the thing said and the mood of the poet saying it. For instance—

“ Besides, the childhood of the day has kept,  
Against you come, some orient tears unwept ” ;  
Again—

“ The Rose was sick and smiling died ;  
And, being to be sanctified,  
About the bed there sighing stood  
The sweet and flowery sisterhood.”

We have seen the growth and culmination of various tendencies in the period ending with the first half of



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the seventeenth century; then comes the Puritan interval, and the changed muse of the Restoration. "It is entirely in keeping," wrote Dr. Richard Garnett, "with the solid and terrestrial character of Restoration literature in general, that no description of poetry should manifest so grievous a lapse from the standard of the preceding age as the lyrical. The decline of the drama has attracted more attention, partly from the violent contrast of two schools, which had hardly one principle or one method in common, partly because our own age had but imperfectly realised the exceeding wealth in song of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, until Mr. Arthur Bullen showed what unsuspected treasures of poetry were hidden in old music-books. Whatever else an Elizabethan or Jacobean lyric may be, it is almost certain to be melodious. The average Restoration lyric is correct enough in scansion, but the melody is conventional, poor, and thin. . . . It was as though a blight had suddenly fallen upon the nation, and men's ears had become incapable of distinguishing between sweetness and smoothness. So, indeed, they had as regarded the music of verse; but how little technical music, whether vocal or instrumental, was neglected, even in private circles, we may learn from Pepys's Diary . . . the only explanation is, that the age preceding that of the Restoration was poetical, and the Restoration age was prosaic." This passage is interesting in its emphasis upon that separation between music and poetry which seemed to grow in proportion to the growth of civilisation, sophistication, and specialisation. The separation can never be complete; and though in itself it is desirable, when regarded from the point of view of abstract theories about the adequacy

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of each particular art, still its first definite appearance in the history of English lyric seems to have told temporarily against the lyric itself. It was inevitable that the arts should draw apart, and the severance is fully justified both in theory and in fact; but it was equally inevitable that the process should entail temporary loss, and should be gradual. Of the two pre-eminent lyricists of the eighteenth century, Burns and Blake, the former was utterly possessed of the idea of tune, and of the latter Professor Raleigh writes: "It seems that he sang his own lyrics to tunes of his own choice, and shaped them by that loose prosody which music supplies." What Wordsworth thought of the connection with music we have already seen; by his time the process of separation had gone too far to be treated as anything but necessary and almost complete. It is of the nature of lyric to be infinitely adaptable and for ever modern. If the epic is indeed past reviving, it is because certain quite casual and local characteristics have been insisted on as essential to anything which is to bear that name. The long narrative poem is still possible; but yet there is this difference—that it is not hard to imagine a state of national impulses and interests in which the long narrative poem would cease to be possible while yet the lyric mood remained; but to imagine a state hostile to lyric is to conceive it as coming under that condemnation pronounced by Dr. Garnett upon the eighteenth century, of being definitely unpoetical, a "prosaic" age. Modernity does seem to tell against length and patience; it may be that—

"This strange disease of modern life  
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,"



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while it gains in innumerable subtleties and intricacies of excitement, loses the augustness, the tranquillity, the spaciousness required for a long poem. But against any such indictment must be set the vital fact that size is not an essential of greatness. The μέγεθος that Aristotle requires in art is only just so much as shall exhibit the qualities of art within itself; true greatness may belong to the slightest and briefest song. But this at any rate may be admitted—that tragedy and epic, however widely interpreted, do preserve a certain rigour of requirement which may or may not be consonant with the prevailing mood of any particular epoch, while lyric asks only the pure poetic impulse and power; if the age feels in that way which at once demands and compels the service of poetry, it will express itself in some such way as may fairly be called lyrical. But it will tend too, after a while, to experiment in new forms, and to blur definitions. There will be lyrical this and lyrical that, over and above the lyric pure and simple. All this has been already urged as part of the nature of lyric; we come now to the illustration of it in the development of English poetry. The dissociation from music was at once a result and a cause of complication and confusion. It gave greater scope, and opportunity for greater completeness in the several kinds. Boundaries became and remain insecure. The elegy is of course by derivation to be distinguished from the lyric; but an anthology of English lyrics might well contain, not only Gray's Elegy, but that succession of the peculiar glories of the English muse—Lycidas, Adonais, and Thyrsis; nor must we forget that Wordsworth classed his ode on the "Intimations of Immortality" as an "elegiac piece."

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Lycidas, Adonais, and Thyrsis all owe something, indeed much, to the Bion Moschus and Theocritus tradition; the long irregular ode goes back to Pindar through the harmonies of Gray, the irregularities of Cowley, the learning of Ben Jonson, and the experiments of the Pléiade. Both ode and elegy originally required musical accompaniment; but with the absence of music, the fusion seems complete. Adonais might, it is true, be excluded from a lyrical anthology on the merely external ground of length; but Lycidas and Thyrsis present a singleness and persistence of inspiration within a narrower compass. The ode is an acknowledged lyrical form; the elegiac, at any rate to Wordsworth, is not; yet he could call his greatest ode elegiac because of its subject; and if Lycidas is lyrical, why not Adonais? And if Gray's Pindaric odes are lyrical, why is not his elegy? Is it because of the subject? But the subject of Wordsworth's ode does not suffice to prevent it from being an ode. Is it because of the quietness of mood, the slowness of movement? If so, what of Collins's ode to Evening? Surely that is lyrical. Or again, is it because of the scrupulous and laborious care of the composition? But what then of Gray's own odes? Any one form as it now exists sums up a thousand tendencies, is the fruit of innumerable arguments and experiments. So distinct and so complete within itself, yet so obscure and multiform in origin, is any lyrical or quasi-lyrical poem of modern times, that a general survey becomes impossible. The variety, the adaptability, bewilder. But there is one lyrical measure existing in the English language at once sufficiently popular to be regarded as a national and typical form of expression, and suf-



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ficiently exact to be regarded as bound up of necessity with rule—one form in which to transgress the letter of the law is to abandon something of the spirit; and it is worth while, taking that form, the sonnet, as a type of the exactest metrical precision our language knows, to trace its growth in the hands of successive generations of poets; for here if anywhere will lie an answer to that ancient and baffling question of the correspondence of form and matter—of how far the thought gains or loses by subjecting the inspiration of the moment to the formula sanctioned and approved by time—and we shall find it, if we do find it, just where our inquiry set out to look for it—in that very kind of poetry which would seem to allow least of limit and law, and to cry most urgently for freedom of utterance to the four winds of heaven. Never were the dramatic conventions necessitated by stage-representation, or those formulæ of composition which seem likely to keep the epic a dead form henceforward, so close a bondage for the subject-matter to which they were applied, as the inexorable rhythm and enumeration of the sonnet for the suddenness and splendour of the lyric. It is exactly in the contrast between the sonnet and the occasional pieces called vaguely "lyrical" that we shall find light thrown upon the nature of lyric; for in so far as it is a form, lyric is but a special case of this question of relation of form to matter; and it is because we find it wavering from fixed types to instances of entirely baffling vagueness and uncertainty that it raises so difficult a problem. Where some poems of a certain kind have their laws given, and some again give their own laws at the moment of their conception, what law that is universal shall be found, what formula that is binding? Comparison with

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drama and epic is for this reason hard to draw ; while these cling to their ancient structure for fear that, breaking it, they should lose something of themselves, the lyric changes lightly and sympathetically. Not so, however, the precise sonnet-form ; and by its unique quality it furnishes a clue to all the rest of the difficulty. It is necessary to revert in connection with this one instance of the sonnet to the whole question of spontaneity and inspiration, and to recapitulate conclusions. The poet has an idea to be expressed ; the form should be chosen for him by the necessities of his subject. One would not expect that, if a man started by saying ' Shall I put this idea into a sonnet or an ode ? ' the result would be satisfactory. One would rather expect the poet, looking back upon a completed poem, to be able to say with Mr. Austin Dobson—

" I intended an ode,  
And it turn'd to a sonnet."

Instances of deliberate choice are of course familiar in the larger modes ; Milton was not sure whether he would write an epic or a drama, nor even of the subject he would treat. Dr. Bradley has shown how the subject in this sense is external to the poem, and how the same is true of the external form, the architectural structure. But the special claim of lyric is to present in a brief span and a single view that union of form with matter which is necessary to all art. In what way this claim is justified may best be shown by a summary account of the particular lyrical kind, the sonnet. To us it seems a difficult and exacting one ; but it originated quite naturally to music and in a language whose abundance of rhymes made light of the difficulty. It was intro-



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duced from Italy to France and from both to England as a literary exercise. It has to be remembered as a fact, whatever theory of inspiration we may hold, that the first line of a sonnet of the accepted type must end in a syllable to which the language will supply three further rhymes. Hence the temptation to the use of it as an exercise merely. The stress laid upon it was characteristic of the whole mood and spirit in which the borrowings of the Elizabethans were conducted. "The Elizabethan sonnet," says Mr. Lee, "offers the best of all illustrations of the vast debt that Elizabethan literature owed to foreign influences. For practical purposes the sonnet may be regarded as an invention of Italy. It was at any rate the Italian writers of the thirteenth century who first gave the genre definite or permanent shape and character. Dante (1265-1321) may fairly be reckoned the earliest sonneteer of historic interest. . . . In the fourteenth century Petrarch (1304-74) assumed Dante's mantle, and devoted his main literary energy to sonneteering. Although his sonnets differ little from Dante's either in form or spirit, Petrarch's fame as a sonneteer quickly outran that of his predecessor. Petrarch was the sonneteer who finally dominated Western Europe; and no subsequent practitioner in the art in Italy, France, Spain, or England during the two centuries which followed his achievement, failed to bear witness to his mighty influence." Again: "While pointing out to the French nation all the avenues to literary culture which the ancient classics offered them, Du Bellay was especially emphatic in his commendation of the Italian sonnet as a main source of culture. 'Sonne-moi ces beaux sonnets, non moins docte que plaisante invention italienne, pour lesquels

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tu as Pétrarque et quelques modernes Italiens.'"

The connection of the sonnet with music is very intimate; it is thought to have grown originally from a form of Provençal song in the eleventh or twelfth century, and sonnets were set and sung all over Europe in the countries, and during the period, of their greatest prevalence. The fashion of writing them came into England with Wyatt and Surrey, and those who followed the fashion, up till nearly the end of the sixteenth century, by taking over the matter and method as well as the form avoided the difficulties of constraining the one to the other. There might have been the trouble of the repeated rhyme, but for the most part they did not keep to the strict Petrarchan model. Spenser compromised in the form *ababbcbccdcdee*, and Sidney wrote correctly enough; but the so-called Shakespearean form prevailed, and in the hands of Shakespeare himself, of Keats and—in one instance at any rate—of Drayton, has given us material for a noble if a different tradition. When the change came and the critical spirit triumphed, of necessity the fashion of the conventional sonnet-sequence was over. But the sonnet itself was evidently congenial to something in the national temper, for it survived to good purpose, both in the Petrarchan and in the Shakespearean type. The rhyme-formula of the latter is *ababcdcdefefgg*, of the former *abbaabba*, with a certain amount of license in the arrangement of the sestet, which may have two or three rhymes, in almost any order. The two commonest modifications of the Petrarchan kind have been the octave *abbaacca*, and the concluding couplet in the sestet. But the rhyme-arrangement is not the only requirement; the movement is equally essential.



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"The sonnet is a wave of melody :

From heaving waters of the impassioned soul  
A billow of tidal music one and whole  
Flows in the 'octave' ; then, returning free,  
Its ebbing surges in the 'sestet' roll  
Back to the deeps of life's tumultuous sea."

This exactness of break and turn even Wordsworth and Rossetti have on occasion disregarded ; but Milton, in definitely avoiding it, created practically a new type of sonnet, though few have ever attempted to follow his example. He was rid too of the convention implied in the sequence ; his sonnets are free, and fit each to a definite occasion. This is not to deny to all his predecessors either sincerity of feeling or adequacy of result ; but even those whose love we may believe to have been neither a pose nor a Platonic aspiration after an ideal beauty, but an actual and human passion—even Spenser and Shakespeare—fall into their place in the general vogue and accept, however much they may glorify, the method. Milton wrote sonnets only when he had something, whether noble or trivial, to say ; he confined himself to specific occasions. From his time onwards the history of the sonnet need comprise but a few pre-eminent names. Keats perhaps stands alone in having written beautiful poetry in both the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean kind. Wordsworth wrote, besides some hundreds which will never emerge from obscurity, a considerable number of the finest sonnets in the language, keeping to the Petrarchan model with reasonable fidelity. He has been accused, with some injustice, of rejecting or avoiding one of the chief ornaments of the sonnet in the hands, say, of Rossetti—the sonorous last line. But sonority is an easily over-rated quality.

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"The mere volume of sound," says Myers—"the actual sonority of the passage—is a quite subordinate element in the effect, which is produced mainly by relations and sequences of vowels and consonants, too varying and delicate to be reproduced by rule." Neither Rossetti nor any other good poet ever aimed at a last line which should be just "sound and fury"; it is not for volume but for sufficiency of sound that the ear waits as the end of a poem approaches. The effect is so striking and complete in Rossetti because his sonnets accumulate such force, move so augustly, and close so aptly, with a sort of precision of magnificence; they are triumphant in their energy and in the control of it, and they move to an inevitable end. Wordsworth was not deficient in this kind—

"Or the unimaginable touch of time"

is as splendid an instance as could be found; but Rossetti does perhaps achieve this particular effect most often of all English poets—

"And watered with the wasteful warmth of tears."—

"Follow the desultory feet of death."—

"Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes."

—examples crowd upon the memory. But the triumph of the last line is not to be distinguished from triumphant creation of the sonnet as a whole; it is not a different art, but a portion of the same. There is then a sense in which it is undoubtedly true to say that Rossetti stands supreme among sonneteers; and it is just in this supremacy of his that we find the secret of the sonnet. The intricacy of the form was not to him an obstacle, but a tool, because he grew in the sonnet-tradition;



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the very thoughts and music of those early Italians, his masters, were all about him ; the formula was not a convention imposed, it was apt and ready. Into it he wrought with ease the modern subtlety of his thought and the luxurious profusion of his imagery ; in him it is manifest how—

“ The form remains, the function never dies.”

The form remains because it is adaptable, perpetually new ; it is not so much a vessel fit to receive many different distillations as a body that can become literally one with many different souls ; it is the organ of the tradition that produces it. Wordsworth has well criticised it, and by implication all literary and artistic laws, in his lines—

“ Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room ;  
And hermits are contented with their cells ;  
And students with their pensive citadels :  
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
Sit blithe and happy ; bees that soar for bloom,  
High as the highest peak of Furness Fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells :  
In truth, the prison unto which we doom  
Ourselves, no prison is : and hence to me,  
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound  
Within the sonnet's scanty plot of ground,  
Pleased if some souls (for such there needs must be)  
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.”

It is important, however, that one should quarrel with the phrase “ the weight of too much liberty ” ; for surely it is a question rather of kind than of degree.

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Liberty, however great, need not, any more than need custom, lie upon us

“ with a weight

Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life ! ”

The secret of art, like the secret of life, is in the union, the conjunction, the proportion, the adaptation ; the sonnet is a type in poetry of what ritual may be in religion ; and Wordsworth's analogy of the nun leads naturally to a quotation from Mrs. Meynell in which this side of the truth about art is made for ever clear :

“ The monastery, in like manner, holds its sons to little trivial rules of time and exactitude, not to be broken, laws that are made secure against the restlessness of the heart fretting for insignificant liberties—trivial laws to restrain from a trivial freedom. And within the gate of these laws which seem so small, lies the world of mystic virtue. They enclose, they imply, they lock, they answer for it. Lesser virtues may flower in daily liberty and may flourish in prose ; but infinite virtues and greatness are compelled to the measure of poetry, and obey the constraint of an hourly convent bell. It is no wonder that every poet worthy the name has had a passion for metre, for the very verse. To him the difficult fetter is the condition of an interior range immeasurable.” The other side of the truth about art is suggested in a sentence of Shelley's: “ It is by no means essential that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that the harmony, which is its spirit, be observed. . . . Every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification.” Thus does each successive problem—



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that of artistic creation at large, that of the relation of one form of art, the lyric, to poetry as a whole, that again of the sonnet within the lyric, and finally that raised in the two quotations just contrasted—imply all the others, and demand a solution which shall meet them all. Shelley claims for the poet leave to depart from tradition, Mrs. Meynell emphasises the value of tradition to the poet; but the opposition is only in the mode of expression. It remains true that art justifies itself, and that the one test of any kind of art is whether or no it gets its own effect. If we figure the world as engaged in a great attempt, amid innumerable confusions, to become one with some celestial archetype, some world already ordered and serene, then we can think of any work of art which achieves its own end as a step towards success, a bolt shot securely and indubitably home in the intangible mechanism of the universe. We hear the ring of it. It is idle to set up a contrast between the superficially novel methods of Walt Whitman and the more obviously artistic work of Tennyson, as though the one could break away from his heritage while the other was content to inherit his. In each and any case there must be a utilisation of all the material to hand, but there must be a revelation too, or the product is not art. The kind of newness that we require for originality to be claimed and allowed is in a sense only the making plain of what is already there, the reconciliation with an eternally existent reality. The critical faculty is no more and no less than the capacity to recognise this revelation when it is made. To say that the movement of Whitman's verse obeys no technical law that could have been framed on the strength of previously accepted literature, is only to

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say of it what can be said of Tennyson too, and is by no means to deny its correspondence with a profounder law. Indeed, it is just the same fundamental rightness which we recognise in one poet as in another. Whitman is an artist in virtue of his great and magical phrases: "lovely and soothing death," "the huge and thoughtful night"; he is a lyrist in virtue of the way his verse can on occasion run—

"Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,"

"When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed."

To speak of Whitman as breaking away from tradition is to ignore the singleness of the poetic note, to forget that no new form is possible without a new inspiration, and that, just as inevitably, new inspiration will always require a new form. The difference between the novelty of Rossetti and the novelty of Whitman is trivial and external; in the sense that matters, each is both new and old in precisely the way in which every artist must be. It is a mistake to represent the invention of new modes as a departure from law; it is rather a step in the approximation to those eternal laws which are set as types and controllers of our thought. The lesson of the sonnet, whose rules cease in the right hands to be obstructions and become the ministers of inspiration, is but the counterpart of another lesson—that diversity of form is demanded by diversity of impulse, in order that rules may not be imposed in those cases and upon those artists in which and by which they would be felt to be obstructions. Just as it was said in the case of Blake, that we feel him to be justified only when he gives us what we sub-



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consciously expect—that is to say, what we recognise as harmonious with the ultimate law—so on the side of the artist, the acceptance of rule must be in a sense subconsciously—must be an act rather of faith than of reason. The flying dream is reconciled in creative art with the abiding law; but yet the artistic, like the moral impulse, works within space and time, and in some way not to be understood must approximate, if progress be a reality, through the years to that which is timeless. Hence the increase both in number of kinds of expression, and in exactness of any one kind; for these are the ways in which the approximation to the ultimate may most fairly be supposed to take place. There is it has been maintained above, an absolute standard of worth; and indeed a fixed standard is necessary if progress is to have any meaning at all. Good poetry puts us in touch with something outside the temporal and mutable nature of things, and so we need not ask in what age or under what circumstances it has been composed. But undeniably also each particular epoch both demands and renders possible a particular kind of artistic effect. To ignore this would be to ignore the essential value of position. Our claim for the lyric note is that it is too fundamental a thing to allow of definition; it cannot be confined to a type; its very singleness is warrant that it may be preserved despite a thousand external changes and differences. It is one kind of union of form with matter, an unmistakable and enduring kind; it persists, not through time, but timelessly. Yet in so far as it is a human product, its manifestation must be temporal and vary with casualties of circumstance. Hence the possibility of the value of critical distinction; hence the importa

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of reverting to the manifold growth and development, the change that has come over lyric with its divorce from music and with the coming of the modern temper.

So we return to our starting-point. "For pure poignancy, profundity, and weight," writes J. A. Symonds, "Elizabethan lyrics will compare not unfavourably with Victorian. The difference does not consist in the ore worked by the lyrists, but in their way of handling it. In this latter age a poet allows himself far wider scope of treatment when he writes a song. He does not think of the music of voice or viol, but of that harmony which intellectually sounds in the ears of the soul. The result is a wealthier and fuller symphony, reaching the imaginative sense not upon the path of musical sound, but appealing to the mental ear and also to that 'inward eye which is the bliss of solitude.' The Victorian lyric, superior in its range, suggestiveness, variety, and richness, inferior in its spontaneity and birdlike intonation, corresponds to the highly-strung and panharmonic instrument of the poet's spirit which produced it, and to the manifold sympathies of the reader's mind for which it was intended. It is iridescent with the intermingled hues of fancy, contemplation, wisdom, personal passion, discursive rhetoric, idyllic picture-painting. Modes of complicated expression, involving serried reasoning, audacious metaphors, elliptical imagery, and rapid modulations from one key of feeling to another, which playwright like Shakespeare employed only in his dramatic dialogue, find themselves at home in the lyrical poetry of our own age." Symonds perhaps misunderstood what kind of spontaneity it was that the Elizabethans could justly claim; but his general presentment



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of the differences of temper is correct, except in so far as it might give the false impression of a modern lyric being necessarily elaborate. Of course the influence of growth is all the other way; it is to give greater force to simplicity. For each word has been used in many positions that its new position has incomparable force. It is the supreme power of the poet to call tears with utterly simple and commonplace words, have the effect of a child's voice singing. To compare the way in which Shakespeare and Browning used this power will be to establish the singleness of the lyric note and to show at the same time the change in external potentialities that has been wrought by time. Shakespeare has a certain carelessness in his casual songs, he can convey what he wishes to convey by the mere nonsense—

"When that I was and a little tiny boy,  
With hey ho, the wind and the rain,  
A foolish thing was but a toy,  
For the rain it raineth every day."

Or again—

"It was a lover and his lass,  
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,  
That o'er the green cornfield did pass,  
In the spring-time, the only pretty ring time,  
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;  
Sweet lovers love the spring."

The poignancy in Browning of Andrea del Sarto's—

"I often am much wearier than you think,"

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or Pompilia's—

" I am just seventeen years and five months old,  
And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks——"

would be better compared with the great lines of Shakespeare's tragedies, for it requires the same consciously dramatic setting ; but it is instructive to note, against the extravagant looseness of the Shakespearean lyric at its simplest, how Browning accumulates, for his own simplicity, and for the achievement of a very similar triumph in the purely lyrical kind, every device of the exactest artistry.

" I will hold your hand but as long as all may,  
Or so very little longer,"

he writes with superb adequacy of expression—" an effortless and absolute sublimity " ; or again—

" Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead,"

or—

" It all comes to the same thing in the end,"

or—

" This is Ancona, yonder is the sea " ;

or again—

' What a name ! was it love or praise ?  
Speech half-asleep or song half-awake ?  
I must learn Spanish one of these days,  
Only for that slow sweet name's sake."

The third line of these four is comparable only, in its kind, with the last of the following—

" Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen  
By the means of Evil that Good is best,



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And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven  
serene,—

When our faith in the same has stood the test—

Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,  
The uses of labour are surely done;  
There remaineth a rest for the people of God:  
And I have had troubles enough, for one."

The nature of lyric is an unchanging and immortal thing; but we see here how it takes the accidents of time as a means to its own perfection. It is single, and achieves its end in innumerable ways.

THE END

Gaylord

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